Before The Ball by AwkwardFudgeball

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Summary: Hopper's pretty much clueless when it comes to topics concerning Eleven like the Snow Ball. Luckily, he knows a teenage girl who lends a hand. Nancy/El sister-ish fluff ensues. Dad Hopper. *complete*

Before The Ball

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things!

Eleven was sitting across from Hopper in silence, picking at her toast halfheartedly. She missed Mike. Hopper promised her she'd be able to see him "soon"...she didn't like that word. It was too vague. Last time, it meant three hundred and fifty three days. Plus, they'd ran out of eggos (thus the toast), and that didn't help her already poor mood.

Hopper wasn't saying anything, either; El figured he'd taken note of her attitude. But, after staring at the wall for quite some time, Hopper spoke with a tone that wasn't the slightest bit annoyed.

"The Snow Ball's soon," Hopper said, "Mike's talked to you about that, hasn't he?"

Eleven perked up -slightly, "Yes. Last year,"

Hopper paused, as if he was unsure of what he was about to say, "You can go,"

El's eyes lit up and her smile was the opposite of subtle. She'd wanted to go to the Snow Ball ever since Mike mentioned it the previous year, but she wasn't able to go. She remembered that day all the same. It was a week or two after Hopper had found her; she'd already started "contacting" Mike.

"It's day thirteen," He had said, *"And it's the night of the Snow Ball. I -I'm not going. What's the point? It wouldn't be the same without you. I miss you, El,"*

Even now, she remembered those words. She remembered how his voice trembled slightly, and how she wished she could respond to him. She wanted to go to the Snow Ball with him more than anything, but it fit under Hopper's set of "don't be stupid" rules. And now, she had the chance to.

"Kid?" Hopper asked. Eleven's smile had faded and she'd been staring blankly at her half-eaten breakfast.

Eleven snapped her head up, aware of what was actually happening again, "I -I can go?"

"Yeah," Hopper said, grinning, "You can go,"

Hopper stayed busy for the next few days, dealing with the usual disputes and one convenience store robbery (all they took was a can of tuna fish). He could've sworn the people of Hawkins became ornery as the weather grew colder. Incidentally, when he looked at the calendar and saw 'snow ball' scribbled in Eleven's messy handwriting on that coming Saturday, he panicked.

He dialed the number for the Byers quickly.

"Hello?"

"Jonathon? It's Chief. Is your mom there by any chance?"

"No, she's at work," Jonathon said. He noticed how rushed Hopper's words were, *"Is everything okay?"*

"Yeah. Yeah, everything's fine," Hopper said, *"Do you know the Wheelers' number?"*

Jonathon gave him the number without questioning it (verbally, at least), and Hopper dialed it as fast as he could.

Mike was the one who picked up.

"Hey, Mike," Hopper said, glad that it wasn't one of their parents. He didn't know how to explain why the chief was calling their house and knew their kids by name, "Is your sister home?"

"Nancy?" Mike asked, confused. What could Hopper possibly need from *Nancy*, of all people? *"Yeah, she's home,"*

"Can I talk to her, please?"

After a short pause, Mike handed the phone over to Nancy, *"Hopper?"*

"Yeah. Listen, the Snow Ball is tomorrow and I forgot. I promised

Eleven she could go. All she's got are Mike's old clothes and I can't exactly take her into town. Do you have any old dresses?"

"Yeah, I should have a couple lying around. I can bring them by tomorrow before the dance, if that's okay?"

"That's fine. I do have one more favor to ask, though," Hopper said, "I'm assuming you're fairly good at hair and makeup and that type of thing?"

It was hard sneaking out of the house with a tote full of clothes discretely, but Nancy managed it and made her way to the little cabin. She did her best to remember the knock Hopper went over with her. She must've gotten it right, because Hopper opened the door for her hardly three seconds later.

Eleven, only having heard of the plan moments ago, was perched on the couch, waiting.

"I have eight, I think," Nancy said, lifting up her bag.

Hopper looked at her in slight disbelief, "I thought you said there were a *couple*?"

Nancy just smiled, "A girl needs her options,"

"Right," Hopper said. Eleven was practically bouncing with excitement; he would sacrifice a bit of his manliness for her to stay that way.

"Well, let's get started, El!" Nancy said, pulling out a folded lump of pale pink and handing it to the girl, "Try this one,"

A few minutes later, El had stepped timidly back into the living room, and at the same time as Nancy said "Yes!", Hopper said a stern "No."

"Oh, come on! It's cute!" Nancy argued.

"It's too short," Hopper said, crossing his arms, "And too tight,"

"She doesn't have to look like a nun, Hopper,"

"It's a middle school dance. I want her to look *nice*, not grab the attention of all the horny thirteen year old boys,"

"Horny?" Eleven repeated. She hadn't heard that word before.

"Okay!" Nancy said awkwardly, handing Eleven another outfit quickly, "Here. This should fit better,"

Hopper vetoed that one, too, claiming that even though it was longer, it was even tighter than its predecessor. The next time, it was Nancy's turn to disapprove.

"Nope," She said.

"What? I like that one," Hopper said.

Although she didn't say it aloud, Eleven agreed with Nancy. The skirt fell all the way down the her feet, and it was so loose she had to keep tugging the sleeves up. Nancy simply ignored Hopper's protests and handed El a different dress.

"Maybe this one will work," Nancy said. In a very soft whisper, she added, "It matches Mike's outfit, too,"

When El came back in a blue dress with faint brown polka dots that passed Hopper's requirements *and* was approved by Nancy, they stopped the search.

"I think that's the one," Nancy said, smiling, "What do you think, Eleven?"

"Pretty," Eleven said, running her hand over the puffy sleeves.

Nancy spent the next half hour slicking back and shaping El's unruly curls. They'd moved on to makeup which, according to Hopper, had to be kept light.

"Well? How's it look?" Nancy asked Eleven once she had finished the last of it.

Eleven couldn't reply with "bitchin'" this time. Instead, she said the word that floated into her mind, "Nice. It looks...nice,"

"You look very beautiful," Nancy said, tucking one of El's curls back behind her ear. She smiled.

"You ready to go? It's about time," Hopper said, looking at his watch.

Eleven nodded, "Ready,"

"At least let me walk you to the door," Hopper said once they were in the parking lot of the school, "I won't make you hold my hand,"

"Okay," Eleven said, already hopping out of the car.

So Hopper walked her to the door, the music growing louder with each step they took. They were already a few minutes late. Part of Hopper felt like he needed to just turn around and take Eleven home. He wasn't ready for this.

But she was.

"Okay, kid," Hopper said, "Have fun,"

"Thank you," Eleven said quietly.

"And be safe!"

"I will," Eleven started walking closer to the gym.

"And don't let guys touch you below the waist!" Hopper called after her. Eleven waved, "Or above the waist!"

The music suddenly grew muffled; she'd shut the door already.

Hopper sighed. He stared at the blinking blue lights shining through the window for a moment before turning around. He was about to open the door to his Bronco when he saw Joyce Byers, leaning against her car with her arms folded.

This was fun to write...I hope it was fun to read!

Also, since I'm an uber nerd, a friend and I started a ST fanpage of Instagram, sooo if you want to check it out, that'd be fantastic:

[strangerthings.011_eggos]

Thank you for reading my trash :)